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OPERATIONS COORDINATING BOARD
Washington 25, D. C.

August 2, 1954

MEMORANDUM FOR THE OPERATIONS COORDINATING BOARD

SUBJECT: Report on Actions Taken by the U. S. Information Agency in the Guatemalan Situation.

The attached report dealing with USIA activities with respect to the recent armed action in Guatemala is submitted to the Board for its information at the request of the Acting Director of the U.S. Information Agency.

It is believed that this report is pertinent in connection with recent discussions by the Board of the desirability of having a common approach to information activities in connection with the Guatemalan revolt.

Elmer B. Staats
Executive Officer

Attachment:

Subject Report dated 7/27/54.

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UNITED STATES INFORMATION AGENCY
Washington

July 27, 1954

REPORT ON ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE UNITED STATES INFORMATION AGENCY IN THE GUATEMALAN SITUATION

In concert with other departments and agencies and for the purpose of supporting specified foreign policy objectives, the Agency began last November-December 1953 to regroup its limited resources in an effort to meet the growing crisis conditions in Guatemala and neighboring countries. Unfortunately, the sharp cutback in Agency funds and personnel during the summer and fall of 1953 had forced reduction of the already small operations in the area, especially in various smaller countries where the programs amounted to one-man holding operations. Actions taken by the Agency to remedy these deficiencies and to carry out an effective operation may be grouped under three time-periods: the six months prior to the communist arms shipment; the crisis period of May-June; and the current post-crisis period.

I. Pre-Crisis Period

A. Policy - Up to the 10th Inter-American Conference at Caracas in March much Latin American opinion refused to concern itself with the communist issue in Guatemala, either regarding the Arbenz regime as a "home-grown" revolutionary movement dedicated to improving the lot of the exploited Guatemalans, or preferring to dwell on the United Fruit issue and speculate as to United States motives of economic imperialism.

In this context our principal information effort was directed toward creating greater awareness throughout the Hemisphere of the real threat to peace and security posed by the verifiable communist penetration of the Guatemalan government. In accordance with established policy at that time, this effort stopped short of accusations, directly attributed to the Agency, against the Arbenz regime as communist-dominated but did include the preparation and placement of unattributed articles labelling certain Guatemalan officials as communists, and also labelling certain actions of the Guatemalan government as communist-inspired.

Even though Guatemala alone voted against the anti-communist resolution at Caracas, public attention in Latin America did not

begin to focus on the issue of communist penetration and resultant threat to peace and security. With this in mind, the Agency intensified its efforts to get irrefutable evidence publicized throughout the Hemisphere, again short of directly labelling the Arbenz regime as communist but using its actions as self-evident proof.

B. Operations - In November and December, 1953, the information program in Guatemala was reviewed with Ambassador Peurifoy, the Department of State, and the Central Intelligence Agency. A new Public Affairs Officer was appointed and provisions were made for such internal strengthening of personnel and funds as events might require. In order to give direct support to the Guatemalan program, long seriously handicapped in operations through Guatemalan government restrictions, and to help meet the problem of communist penetration in the Central American area, a regional servicing operation was developed whereby USIS Mexico could give program support to Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama. This servicing concentrates on anti-communist materials produced by USIS Mexico in direct collaboration with the other posts and tailored to meet specific needs in individual countries. A third phase of organizational build-up was a considerably expanded 1955 budget projection, parts of which were to be initiated with 1954 funds, especially the strengthening of the one-man holding operations in the smaller countries.

Elsewhere in the Caribbean, and related to the Central American plan, a new office was established in Port-of-Spain for the Trinidad-British Guiana-Barbados area. The existing small operation for the French West Indies, based in Martinique, was re-examined and provision made for selected expansion.

Media and field operations were directed to intensify their efforts in the collection, preparation, and placement of materials demonstrating communist design on, and penetration of, the Hemisphere. A successful project in January, for example, was the preparation here of a series of articles exposing Guatemalan communists Fortuny and Gutierrez; these were planted in a Chilean newspaper and later reprinted in selected other countries with Chilean attribution.

Throughout this period and on through the crisis itself emphasis was placed on cross-reporting Latin American opinion which opposed the Arbenz regime and supported the U.S. stand as taken at Caracas.

The Agency's special coverage team at the Caracas Conference fed out a continuous flow of news, backgrounders, photos, and tape recordings, concentrating on the anti-communist resolution and Guatemala's lone opposition. Through direct Wireless File to all missions and fast pouch these materials were disseminated by all field offices throughout the conference with good placement, backed up by frequent background briefings and conversations with editors,

commentators, and public opinion leaders. Film coverage was arranged for newsreel and TV outlets and, for future continuing use, full film documentation was developed on the anti-communist resolution, including speeches by Secretary Dulles and Assistant Secretary Holland.

II. Crisis Period

A. Policy - The communist arms shipment to Guatemala in mid-May marked a definite turning point: first, among the small neighboring countries fearing intervention or aggression; second, elsewhere in the Hemisphere a mixture of surprise, concern and even alarm at this unexpected development; third, elsewhere in the world as the issue became headline news and the communist propaganda network openly took up Guatemala's cause. Especially significant was the attention given to the problem in Moscow radio broadcasts which from the beginning had been high and became a continuous clamor, so that by June 23 one PRAVDA article was broadcast thirty separate times.

As part of the basic U.S. decision to see the issue through to an emergency OAS meeting of consultation, the Agency immediately embarked upon an aggressive information effort, utilizing all available resources, to expose and discredit the Arbenz regime as communist-dominated, to dramatize the threat to the peace and security of the Hemisphere, and to encourage positive action by other American Republics. This effort included use of direct attribution but continued to emphasize cross-reporting of desirable Latin American opinion. Strong advantage was taken of key developments which helped swing Latin American opinion to our side, such as the Soviet arms delivery and the Guatemalan-Soviet maneuver in the U.N.

Output was directed not only to the hemisphere but also to other parts of the world where, because of public unfamiliarity with the Latin American scene, communist propaganda found ready acceptance. Content was aimed at such attitudes as: skepticism or outright disbelief regarding the U.S. position, ranging to public acceptance of allegations that the U.S. engineered the revolution and that U.S. officials had strong financial interests in the United Fruit Company; public rejection of the premise that international communism had in fact subverted the Guatemalan government; reaction in principle to the U.S. stand on searching vessels in American waters and to the U.S. opposition to U.N. Security Council consideration of the Guatemalan request.

Information treatment was complicated by censorship within Guatemala which, for a period, gave the communist side a distinct advantage in getting out its story first; also by the marked tendency of certain foreign news agencies to cross-report reactions adverse to the U.S. and to select comment out of context.

B. Operations - Benefitting from the previous organizational build-up, an emergency working party under the leadership of the Assistant Director for American Republics was established in the Agency, with special liaison officer assigned to Assistant Secretary Holland in the Department of State. Specialists were reassigned within the Agency to the Policy and Programs Staff for Latin America, the intelligence-research staff, and the press, radio, and films media. A series of directives was issued formulating the various tasks to be undertaken by media and field operations.

Despite the lack of lead time in the policy decision to change from a largely unattributed effort to an aggressive labelling campaign, more than 200 articles, backgrounders, and scripts were prepared and transmitted by Wireless File, cable, and fast pouch during four weeks beginning the end of May for press and radio placement abroad. These were developed partly from public sources and partly from declassified intelligence from State and CIA. Content ranged from coverage of daily developments in Guatemala, Washington, the UN, and elsewhere in the area, to original verified exposes of communist penetration. Illustrative of numerous pamphlets prepared, a "chronology of Communism in Guatemala", written here and printed in Habana in 100,000 copies, was distributed to all posts in Latin America. In addition some 27,000 pieces of anti-communist cartoons and posters were expedited to the field for selective placement. Based on Agency materials WRUL broadcasts were stepped up throughout the crisis period. Newsreel coverage of Guatemala's action in the U.N. and the emergency OAS meeting were released worldwide. Three special film subjects, including the film "Caracas: Resolution and Reality," were sent to all posts in the area.

Not only posts in this area but selected posts around the world regularly filed back useful stories for cross-reporting togehter with analyses of local opinion trends. When it became clear from these reports and other sources that censorship inside Guatemala was preventing foreign correspondents from reporting the story, while at the same time Guatemalan and allied sources were pushing their own version of the revolt, the Agency detailed an experienced press officer to Tegucigalpa in Operation Berry. This consisted of assembling daily, from intelligence sources, a succinct account of events within Guatemala and forwarding by cable to Embassy Tegucigalpa. The press liaison officer informally passed this information along to selected correspondents. Coverage immediately began to improve, helping also to offset cross-reporting by foreign news agencies of anti-U.S. comment.

Field reports now coming in show effective use of materials produced here and by the field posts themselves. Wireless File materials were well received by both metropolitan and provincial papers as timely and effective and were widely printed, frequently without attribution to USIS. This was also true of the anti-communist cartoon prints and plastic plates. Through well-organized mailing

lists the various pamphlets and posters were put into the hands of selected individuals and groups. Local radio outlets likewise were successfully brought into play. For example, the important CMQ network in Cuba early in June agreed to use all hard-hitting commentaries on Guatemala at peak listening hours, without USIS attribution. Selected films were redirected to key groups throughout the area, including films exposing communist activities in other countries clearly paralleling the Guatemalan situation.

III. Post-Crisis Period

At the present time, the information treatment of the Guatemalan problem has entered the phase of disseminating the documentation only now becoming available from within Guatemala, which confirms the communist nature of the Arbenz Government and demonstrates the truth of the representations previously made by the United States. In this task, the Castillo Armas Government can be expected to help by exposing the atrocities and the tactics of the previous administration. Since this is the first time a communist government has been overthrown, a full case history of "rise and fall" is available, pointedly useful on a sustained basis in arousing Latin America to the methods and dangers of communist penetration. This line is also being carried worldwide to offset the large measure of skepticism which characterizes public reaction to the Guatemalan situation.

As part of the basic job of getting verified facts on communist penetration in Guatemala, the Agency detailed two cameramen to Guatemala as soon as it was possible to enter the country. A considerable quantity of sound film documenting communist atrocities is already on hand. Together with other film materials this footage will be developed into two permanent film records on communism in Guatemala, one short subject for immediate theatrical release worldwide and one longer subject for continuing use. A similar effort is being made with regard to still photos and recorded interviews. These and other efforts are in addition to publicizing official statements or reports as they become available for public use.

The Agency will continue to give high priority to Guatemala during what undoubtedly will be a long period of rehabilitation. A long-range effort of re-orientation seems indicated, at government levels and particularly in the interior areas where land has been distributed and doubts about the future persist. The Agency desires to play its part in a coordinated multi-Agency effort and has informally exchanged views with the Department of State on the type and size of resources that might be employed.

In addition to efforts within Guatemala, there is urgent need for a marked step-up in the information program for the hemisphere, for the two-fold purpose of aggressively exposing communist penetration and

bolstering democratic forces. As in efforts directed toward Guatemala, this should be part of a multi-Agency plan of action, bringing to bear on the hemisphere greater attention and larger resources than the U.S. government has given it in the years since the war.